

Arnold JACOBSHAGEN, *Gioachino Rossini und seine Zeit*, Laaber: Laaber-Verlag 2015, 378 S.

Arnold Jacobshagen's new monograph *Rossini and his time* offers a useful companion to the remarkable Rossini Renaissance that started in the 1970s with productions and recordings of many of the composer's less well-known operas, a process reflected in critical editions as well as increasingly specialised academic research. The chapters of his book pay witness to the author's well-informed insights into this body of research. Taking an original thematic approach, biographical narrative is intersected with critical discussion of Rossini's works, performance practice, historical and contemporary reception and recent scholarly debates on nineteenth-century opera. It is not a biography written for the layman: scope and style address a readership of academics and performers. The volume forms part of Laaber's series "great composers and their time", which aims to present readers with an alternative to conventional biographies, emphasising instead the role of the cultural and historical context in which composers lived and worked.

Rossini's extraordinary creative pace after 1812 makes no news, but Jacobshagen goes beyond the anecdotal and supports his research with a robust body of historical evidence, proving many myths correct, others to be freely invented. Much of Stendhal belongs into the latter category. The early start of Rossini's career was less unusual than some of his biographers have claimed. A chapter on humour seems almost obligatory for a book on Rossini, but the author's examples of musical analysis contain several less predictable works, including an interesting section on the composer's late piano pieces. Much biographical detail is revealed in a chapter entitled "Suffering" (*Leid*), incorporating particulars of his medical record and related culinary vices, and for the more sensitive reader perhaps rather too much information on the composer's bodily (dys-)functions. Useful statistics and rich documentary evidence support the chapters on contemporary reception and on the logistics of the composer's dense production schedule. Throughout the book we learn about the often difficult conditions under which his operas were staged. Four chapters discuss questions of genre in Rossini's operas, with particular emphasis on the early series of Venetian *farse* and his eighteen works of *opera seria*, while his three *grands opéras*, written at the end of his operatic career, receive less attention. Jacobshagen demonstrates an impressive understanding of metric structures and related compositional techniques,

and provides a critical overview of the debates on Rossini's approach to formal conventions. He adds a chapter on Rossini's non-operatic oeuvre, which includes about one hundred piano- and twenty religious works, chamber music, hymns and choral compositions. This remains an area we know little about. In more detail Jacobshagen discusses the *Stabat Mater*, which is the one work of this corpus audiences might know relatively well. In a subsequent chapter he argues convincingly that many of the composer's late works reflect his fascination with J. S. Bach, at a time when he was one of only three Italian subscribers to the *Gesamtausgabe*; but the author also dismisses the myth that Mattei and Martini had introduced the young Rossini to the master from Eisenach. Under their sceptre he studied Mozart and Haydn, only to be rewarded with the title *il tedesco*. Jacobshagen's section on connections with "foreign" composers works as a refreshing corrective to the use of narrow national categories in music history. In Germany (but not only) prejudice against Rossini often served as a matrix to stipulate aggressive musical nationalism. Jacobshagen critically reflects upon this tradition, making his work particularly interesting for an international context of debate. He presents a persuasive argument against the idea of a dualism of styles marking the epoch of Beethoven and Rossini, played out early on by Schumann and still informing Dahlhaus' history of nineteenth-century music.

The book reveals less historical context than the series' title promises. Among the glimpses he offers, Jacobshagen convincingly rejects the idea that Rossini's *barbiere* was a democratic or revolutionary hero. More problematic seems his description of Naples' changing dynasties as "foreign" (*Fremdherrschaft*), accepting the anachronistic teleologies of much of Risorgimento historiography (old and new). The book's detailed international bibliography, listing published primary sources as well as an ever-growing body of secondary literature, makes it a useful tool even for non-germanophone readers. The volume includes a (rather too detailed) chronology covering events in Rossini's life as well as historical context; a twenty-page appendix of illustrations (with comments); and a full list of Rossini's works. The volume is not to be missed by scholars of nineteenth-century opera.

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